

VZCZCXRO7631
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #1206/01 1070900
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 170900Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6093
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001206

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON FIGHTING IN JOLO

REF: MANILA 1187

Classified By: CDA Paul W. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Rogue elements of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Commander Habier Malik continue to clash with government security forces on Jolo. Among the casualties during heavy fighting on April 17 reportedly were Malik's brother and cousin. The Philippine National Red Cross, Local Government Units, and Department of Social Welfare and Development are coordinating humanitarian assistance for over 8,000 displaced families. All U.S. Special Operations Task Force personnel remain safe. While Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu has appealed for a

SIPDIS
cease-fire, President Arroyo has reportedly directed the Armed Forces of the Philippines to continue military operations until Malik and his armed followers are "crushed." President Arroyo's resolve to fight until Malik and his men are captured or killed, which the AFP is implementing in a sustained and professional manner, indicates that the Philippine government's long-time tolerance for Malik and his ilk is now over.
End Summary.

Military Operations Continue

¶2. (SBU) President Arroyo told the Philippine press on April 16 that military operations against rogue elements of the MNLF under Commander Habier Malik would continue on Jolo until Malik was "crushed." According to Armed Forces of the Philippines Commander Hermogenes Esperon, about 2,000 troops have been deployed against Malik, who declared a "holy war." The AFP estimates its forces have so far killed at least 32 of Malik's troops and wounded another 54. The AFP continues to receive cooperation from other near-by MNLF commanders.

¶3. (C) During heavy fighting in Bitanag and Tiis on April 17, Malik's brother and cousin were killed, according to JSOTF-P sources. Malik escaped and may have taken refuge with family members in Panamao or Luuk. The AFP has recovered numerous M16s and M203s. Elements of the Abu Sayyaf Group attacked the AFP's 33rd Infantry Battalion at Parang on April 17, wounding at least six AFP soldiers.

¶4. (C) Some rogue MNLF members have apparently fled to coastal areas, possibly to seek refuge on the Pata or Daongdong Islands. During the night of April 16, unidentified elements from the shore fired on a Philippine Navy vessel patrolling near Pitogo point in Tuta Bay, leaving one sailor wounded and the vessel's engine damaged. This was

the second attack on a Philippine Navy vessel in less than 24 hours by suspected rogue MNLF members. JSOTF-P P-3 flights continue to operate and offer deterrence against High Value Targets taking advantage of the situation to flee Jolo.

Humanitarian Assistance

15. (SBU) According to the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), the fighting has already displaced at least 8,400 families. Most are in temporary evacuation centers in Bato-Bato, Buansa, and Talatak barangays in Indanan. The PNRC is coordinating humanitarian assistance for the displaced persons with Local Government Units and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, including medical supplies, food, relief supplies, and medical personnel. PNRC estimates include eighteen wounded Philippine soldiers and two dead. AFP estimates are at least six MNLF soldiers killed.

OIC Appeals for a Cease-fire

16. (C) Organization of Islamic Conference Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu has appealed to the Philippine government and the MNLF to end the fighting and abide by the provisions of the 1996 final peace agreement. MNLF leaders have said that the MNLF was willing to negotiate with Philippine authorities to prevent the armed conflict from escalating, while the government emphasized that its military operations were directed only against rogue elements of the MNLF under Malik.

MANILA 00001206 002 OF 002

Comment

17. (C) The ongoing fighting underscores the difficulties of securing a lasting peace on Jolo and creating the conditions for additional humanitarian assistance by the U.S. and other donors. However, this may reflect a last-gasp effort by Malik and other rogue elements to ruin the prospects for peace. President Arroyo's resolve to fight until Malik and his men are captured or killed, which the AFP is implementing in a sustained and professional manner, indicates that the Philippine government's long-time tolerance for Malik and his ilk is now over.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's
Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>

JONES